

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: Office of Planning and Research
1400 10th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: California Dept. of Transportation
2389 Gateway Oaks Drive, #100
Sacramento, CA 95833

Subject: **Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**
Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

Project Title: US 50 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes and Community Enhancements Project

Project Location: US Highway 50 from downtown Sacramento to Sunrise Blvd., Sacramento County

Project Description: Add High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes in the median of U.S. Highway 50 from downtown Sacramento to Sunrise Blvd. in Sacramento County and identify (or implement) various community enhancements.

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation will be the lead agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible agency is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information in this document that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

A more detailed project description, location map, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials.

A copy of the Initial Study is not attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please direct your response to Ken Lastufka (916-274-0586 or ken_lastufka@dot.ca.gov) at the address shown above. Please supply us with the name for a contact person in your agency.

Date 1 June 2005

Signature
Title


Office Chief North Region
Environmental Services

Project Description

The proposed project will add High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes in the existing median of U.S. 50 from Sunrise Blvd. to downtown Sacramento (Figure 1). Specifically, the project includes:

- Constructing HOV lanes on U.S. Highway 50 from downtown Sacramento to Sunrise Blvd.
- Providing CHP Enforcement Areas in the median at the following locations:
 - Between 39th street and 48th street,
 - Between Howe Avenue and Watt Avenue
 - Between Bradshaw Road and Mather Field Road.
- Evaluating ramp meter deficiencies and the appropriate findings to be included in the final project scope.
- Incorporating the construction of on/off ramps in the median of U.S. 50 in downtown Sacramento in three of the four build alternatives.

The project also proposes to include specific strategies and projects identified to improve the street system adjacent to U.S. 50 to enhance neighborhood livability. These “community enhancements” were identified during the citizen advisory committee meetings that occurred in 2003 (A description of the enhancements is located on the project website at www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/projects/Sac50HOV/documents.htm).

Need and Purpose

Commute travel on U.S. 50 is heavily congested with extensive periods of stop-and-go traffic. Residential, commercial, and employment development in the U.S. 50 corridor is projected to continue growing at a substantial rate with strong job growth in downtown Sacramento, Rancho Cordova, and the City of Folsom. Personal mobility and reliable commute times are declining in the corridor due to increasing traffic congestion on U.S. 50. Downtown Sacramento job growth is increasing the number of commuters and commute buses that travel through residential neighborhoods from freeway exits to employment sites. This U.S. 50 commute traffic affects the quality of life and livability of midtown and downtown neighborhoods.

The project purpose is to:

- Improve mobility.
- Provide an option for reliable peak period travel time.
- Improve traffic operations with particular attention to traffic weave movements in the vicinity of the W/X freeway segment in downtown.
- Use the highway facilities as efficiently as possible.
- Provide incentives for commuters to use carpools, vanpools, or buses for peak period travel.
- Identify specific strategies and projects to improve the adjacent street system so as to enhance neighborhood livability.
- Coordinate with other projects and studies being conducted in the corridor.

Proposed Alternatives

There are five alternatives (four build alternatives and the no-build alternative) proposed for this project (maps of the alternative are available at www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/projects/Sac50HOV/documents.htm):

U.S. Highway 50 - Stockton Blvd. to Sunrise Blvd. Alternative:

- **All Build Alternative**

All of the build alternatives have similar features between Stockton Boulevard and Sunrise Boulevard. Between the beginning of the HOV lane and Bradshaw Road, the existing 11-meter (36-foot) median will accommodate the HOV lanes without outside widening. The width of the median shoulders, HOV lane, and No. 1 and 2 mixed flow lanes would be non-standard; design exceptions for the widths have been approved. Between Bradshaw Road and Sunrise Boulevard, the existing 6.7-meter (22-foot) median isn't sufficient to accommodate the HOV lanes. Outside widening is proposed through this section to provide standard-width lanes and shoulders.

Only minor improvements are currently proposed for interchanges. At the Mather Field Interchange, ramp widening is proposed for the eastbound (EB) off-ramp and the EB diamond on-ramp. At the Zinfandel Drive Interchange, ramp widening is proposed for the EB off-ramp, the EB diamond on-ramp, and the westbound (WB) loop on-ramp. The results of the traffic study could identify additional ramp storage needs.

Currently, the only additional right of way required for all alternatives is two small slivers of acquisitions for ramp widening at the Zinfandel Drive Interchange.

For all build alternatives, the following structures would be widened in the median: Elmhurst Viaduct, Brighton Overhead, Folsom Blvd Undercrossing, and State College Undercrossing. The West Citrus Overhead would be widened on the outside.

U.S. Highway 50 - Downtown Sacramento Alternatives:

- **Alternative 5B**

- 10th Street Eastbound (EB) direct drop on-ramp
- 16th Street Westbound (WB) direct drop off-ramp

Alternative 5B proposes an EB HOV on-ramp in the median (drop on-ramp) at 10th Street and a WB HOV drop off-ramp at 16th Street. In order to avoid a trap lane, the WB HOV lane would transition from the existing median east of the Oak Park Interchange (US 50/SR 99/SR 51) to the existing No. 1 lane west of the Oak Park Interchange. An HOV ramp lane would then be constructed in the median to transition to the drop ramp.

In order to avoid outside widening, the proposed EB drop on-ramp would need to be elevated above the elevated freeway section. Elevating the EB on-ramp provides space in the median to accommodate the WB drop off-ramp. The EB drop on-ramp would be

elevated between Riverside Blvd. and 28th Street, conforming prior to the Oak Park Interchange.

New structures for the EB and WB drop ramps would be constructed, requiring minor modifications to the 10th Street Undercrossing, the Riverside Blvd Undercrossing, the 15th-16th Street Separation, the Camellia City Viaduct (24-248R\L), and the 26th Street Undercrossing.

- **Alternative 6B**

- 10th Street Eastbound (EB) direct drop on-ramp
- 21st Street Westbound (WB) direct drop off-ramp

Alternative 6B proposes an EB HOV drop on-ramp at 10th Street and a WB HOV drop off-ramp at 21st Street. In order to avoid a trap lane, the WB HOV lane would transition from the existing median east of the Oak Park Interchange to the existing No. 1 lane west of the Oak Park Interchange. An HOV ramp lane would then be constructed in the median to transition to the drop ramp.

By providing the WB HOV drop off-ramp at 21st Street, the long elevated EB HOV drop on-ramp required with Alternative 5B is eliminated. However, the EB HOV drop on-ramp cannot directly conform to the elevated freeway without adversely affecting the vertical clearance at Riverside Blvd. Instead, a “whaleback” profile is proposed, resulting in a short elevated ramp section in order to clear Riverside Blvd. This alternative requires about 5 meters (16 feet) of widening on the outside of the EB lanes between about 19th Street and 25th Street so that the EB HOV lane avoids the proposed WB HOV drop off-ramp at 21st Street.

New structures for the EB and WB drop ramps are required. The EB HOV drop on-ramp requires minor modifications to the 10th Street Undercrossing and the Riverside Blvd Undercrossing. The WB HOV drop off-ramp requires minor modifications to the second half of the Camellia City Viaduct. The 15th-16th Street Separation, the first half of the Camellia City Viaduct, and the 26th Street Undercrossing would be decked in the median. The Camellia City Viaduct would also be widened on the outside of the right structure.

- **Alternative 7B**

- 21st Street Eastbound (EB) direct drop on-ramp
- Riverside Blvd. Westbound (WB) direct drop off-ramp

Alternative 7B proposes an EB HOV drop on-ramp at 21st Street and a WB HOV drop off-ramp at Riverside Boulevard. In order to avoid a trap lane, the WB HOV lane would transition from the existing median east of the Oak Park Interchange to the existing No. 1 lane west of the Oak Park Interchange. An HOV ramp lane would then be constructed in the median to transition to the drop ramp.

New structures for the EB and WB drop ramps are required. The WB HOV drop off-ramp requires minor modifications to the Riverside Blvd Undercrossing. The EB HOV drop on-ramp requires minor modifications to the Camellia City Viaduct. The remaining

portions of the viaduct, the 15th-16th Street Separation, and the 26th Street Undercrossing would be decked in the median.

- **Alternative 10D**

- No HOV direct on or off drop ramps
- HOV lanes begin at 9th Street

Alternative 10D proposes to construct HOV lanes in the median without drop ramps. The HOV lanes would begin east of the 9th Street Undercrossing.

The 9th Street Undercrossing, the 10th Street Undercrossing, the Riverside Blvd Undercrossing, the 15th-16th Street Separation, the Camellia City Viaduct and the 26th Street Undercrossing would be decked in the median.

- **No-Build Alternative**

The No-Build Alternative would not implement any of the improvements involved in the project.

High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lane Operational Strategy

Caltrans is also currently conducting a traffic demand analysis and estimates for the related costs and potential revenues of a possible High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lane operational strategy for this project. If the traffic and economic analysis determines that HOT lanes are feasible, a HOT lane alternative will be studied as part of the draft environmental document.

Potential Environmental Impacts

Air Quality

- Project-related air impacts

Biological Resources

- Potential presence of valley elderberries (habitat of the valley elderberry longhorn beetle)
- Bird nesting under bridges or structures (purple martin)
- Bats under bridges or structures
- Removal of oaks

Community Resources

- Impacts of drop-ramps to surrounding neighborhoods
- Impacts to pedestrians and bicyclists
- Economic impacts

- Growth-related impacts
- Impacts of construction-related activities, such as vibration from pile driving

Cultural Resources

- Possible cultural resources discovered during construction

Hazardous Materials

- Aerially deposited lead in soil
- Asbestos in bridges and/or structures

Noise

- Construction-related noise
- Operational noise
- Soundwalls locations (to be determined)

Visual Resources

- Visual impact of elevated ramps downtown
- Visual impact of removed vegetation (vegetation will be replaced as mitigation)

Water Quality

- Impact to existing drainage systems

Environmental Studies

The following environmental studies will be required:

- Air quality
- Biological (Natural Environment Study)
- Cultural resources
- Community impact assessment
- Floodplain/hydrology
- Hazardous materials/waste assessment (Initial Site Assessment, Preliminary Site Investigation)
- Hydrology/water quality
- Noise
- Traffic
- Visual impact analysis

Proposed Scoping Process

Scoping to Date

- Major Investment Study (MIS)
 - The MIS was produced after a four-year regional discussion and consensus building process that involved various local agencies and the public.
 - The MIS included a number of initiatives designed to maintain mobility and provide travel choices along US Highway 50. The addition of HOV lanes between Sacramento and El Dorado Hills was one of the initiatives.
 - The MIS was adopted by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) Board in December 1997
- Community Consensus Building:
 - Began in the spring of 2000, completed in the summer of 2000.
 - The public outreach and education process involved the following five approaches:
 - Individual meetings with stakeholders and interested parties;
 - One-on-one briefings for local elected public officials and their staff;
 - Four public workshops in areas affected by project;
 - Presentations at the June 19, 2000 Neighborhood Advisory Group meeting and the June 14, 2000 Watt Avenue workshop;
 - An interactive web site.
 - Caltrans produced a final report in September 2000.
- Presentations to various local agencies and boards:
 - Presentation to the Project Steering Committee with representatives from SACOG, City of Sacramento, County of Sacramento, Regional Transit, Sacramento Transportation Authority (STA), and Caltrans on September 9, 2002.
 - Presentation to the STA board on September 12, 2002.
 - Presentation to the Sacramento City Council on February 10, 2003.
- Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC):
 - In the fall of 2002, Caltrans conducted outreach to notify the community of the CAC's formation and to encourage people who live, work or commute along the corridor, or who represent organizations with an interest in the corridor, to apply to serve on the CAC. Eighteen individuals with various backgrounds and interests were selected.
 - The CAC met monthly from January to October 2003 (there was no meeting in April).
 - The CAC offered feedback and comments on the pros and cons of each alternative, made recommendations for potential community enhancements, and identified additional alternatives to be considered in the environmental document.
 - A final report was published in November 2003.

Future Scoping

- Conduct public open houses/scoping meetings in conjunction with the release of this NOP.
- Consultation with various local, state and federal agencies, including:
 - City of Sacramento
 - County of Sacramento
 - State Historic Preservation Office
 - Federal Highway Administration
- Preparation of a Public Participation Plan.

Project Environmental Schedule*

Begin environmental studies:	March 2005
Circulate environmental document:	November 2006
Target project and environmental approval date:	September 2007

*Schedule dates are tentative, and may change.